

## Wagner's Use of the Formal Lament for King Mark in *Tristan und Isolde*

### Background:

The composer Richard Wagner often expressed his distaste for “number” operas and other contrived forms used in the Italianate works of his forerunners and contemporaries. In place of these operatic conventions, Wagner drew upon the Tragedy of Ancient Greece to propose a “total artwork” (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) with no contrived breaks for conventional form. Despite, or perhaps because of, his aversion toward operatic formal conventions, Wagner turned to one such form for his music for King Mark in *Tristan und Isolde*.

### Methods:

This poster demonstrates Wagner's use of lament tropes from the poetry of Greek Tragedy and from seventeenth-century Italian opera within his own revolutionary practice of the dramatic narrative to create a formal operatic lament for the King in Act Two, Scene Three.

### Discussion:

This apparent contradiction between theory and practice seems to be intentional—by turning to the poetic and musical form of the operatic lament, Wagner presents King Mark as representative of courtly life, chivalry, and honour. He not only functions as friend and husband to the title characters but also serves as the dramatic personification of chivalric tradition. Wagner's use of these traditional forms further emphasizes the artifice of kingly rule and courtly honour, and strengthens the case for the king as the wronged member of the eternal love triangle.

### Interdisciplinary Reflection:

Opera is an inherently interdisciplinary form, bringing together poetry, drama, and music. My analysis emphasizes how Wagner, who wrote both the text and the music, brings these arts together in his concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.